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ABSTRACT

Cooperative education blends theory and practice, and is explicitly concerned with the development of competencies as well as knowledge. Evidence is presented to show that cooperative education in education and the practice of combining working experience with formal study has been in use for some time. The value of such programs has been demonstrated in many academic areas including medicine, dentistry, law, engineering, and business administration. Recently, the value of such programs in the humanities, social sciences, and fine arts has been realized. The specifics of the cooperative education program at California State University at Fullerton are outlined with emphasis on how the program meets the educational needs of the students. (JMF)

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COOPERATIVE EDUCATION:

A PERSPECTIVE

Bernard L. Hyink

AN OCCASIONAL REPORT
ON INNOVATION

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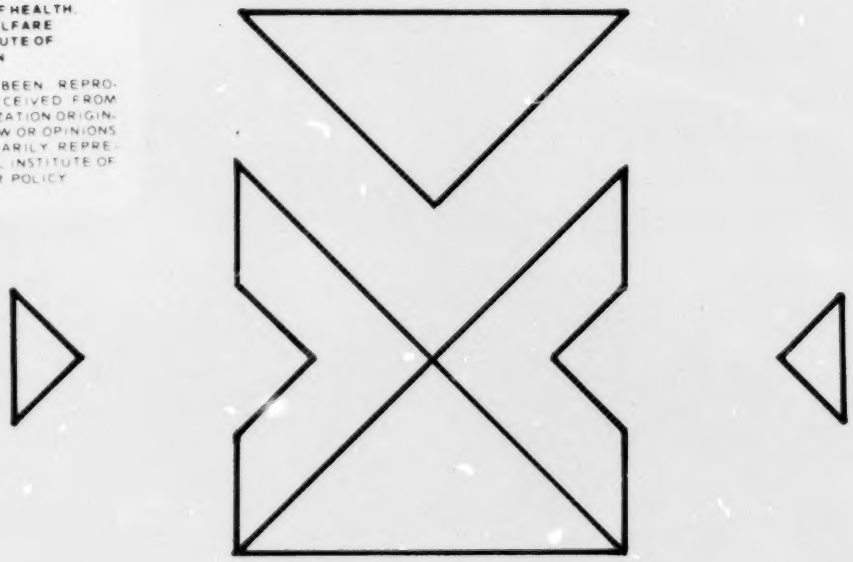

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" There are those who view experiential learning . . . . as a dilution of academic quality. Then there are those who believe that real and lasting learning only comes about through experience. "

During the last few years we have witnessed a spectacular and unprecedented increase in the growth of cooperative education throughout the United States. Dr. William C. White, the provost of Northeastern University, commented that in 1930 four or five persons would get together at the American Society for Engineering Education and talk about cooperative education. By 1970, 500 would get together for the same purpose. When I attended Antioch College in the 1930's, there were only three or four colleges and universities offering cooperative education programs, and for several years following there was very little increase in the number of college programs. However, in the last seven years the number of colleges and universities in the United States offering cooperative education has grown from 127 to over 1,000. Some 20,000 different employers in business, industry, and government are now involved in cooperative education programs. Although accurate statistics on student enrollment in cooperative education are hard to come by, reliable estimates indicate that there are now more than 200,000 college students participating in cooperative education.

Is Cooperative Education, Education?

Is cooperative education, education? Why has cooperative education suddenly come into such prominence in colleges and universities? Are the reasons for the increased interest in cooperative education valid and significant? Further, does it appear as though cooperative education is just a passing fancy, and will it soon decline in importance in American education? These are questions which we should ask as we look to the future of cooperative education.

One of the reasons for the great interest in, and support of, cooperative education is that it *is* good education. As generally defined, cooperative education is a program in which classroom study is combined with a closely related work experience – and experience is a good teacher.

There has been, and still is, some controversy over the value of experience as compared with formal study and the accumulation of knowledge. There are those who view experiential learning, such as that which takes place in cooperative education, as a dilution of academic quality. Then there are those who believe that real and lasting learning only comes about through experience. On this subject there is a Welsh proverb, "Experience is the fool's best teacher; the wise do not need it." However, there is the German proverb that "He who burns his mouth, blows his soup." William Hazlitt wrote, "You know more of a road by having travelled it than by all the conjectures and descriptions in the world."

This dichotomy between formal study and experience, as it relates to learning, is unfortunate. The truth of the matter is that learning occurs both in the classroom and outside the classroom. And as George Santayana expressed it in *The Life of Reason,* "The great difficulty in education is to get experience out of ideas." Cooperative education combines formal academic study with a related work experience, and thus achieves the best of two worlds. The basic idea behind cooperative education is to integrate education into the lives of people. Students in this way can work and live among the people as they complete their college education.

Whereas the early colleges in America stressed the classics and philosophy, gradually society demanded more of educational institutions. Practical subjects such as agriculture, business, and engineering became major areas of study in the land grant universities, and professional graduate schools of medicine, dentistry, law, architecture, and education became permanent fixtures of our large universities. It is interesting and important to note that in these fields of study, we quickly discovered the value and the necessity of practical experience. Those students who were planning to become doctors, dentists, architects, or teachers were required to complete an internship in a clinic, office, or classroom. Degrees were not awarded unless a professional working experience had been completed.

In 1906, Dean Herman Schneider of the University of Cincinnati established the requirement that all students in engineering must complete a professional working experience prior to graduation. We often refer to this year as the beginning of cooperative education in America. However, the principle involved antedated the University of Cincinnati requirement. As already noted, other professional graduate schools had required a working experience as a degree requirement. Cooperative education as we know it today is firmly rooted in the educational process of this country.

At the present time we are expanding the concept of a working experience by establishing internships and cooperative education projects in almost every field. Many universities, including my own, operate internships in a variety of academic areas including anthropology, art, biology, computer science, criminal justice, drama, history, music, political science, sociology, physical education, and speech. Thus, we are realizing the values of a practical working experience in the areas of humanities, liberal arts, and the fine arts.

True cooperative education in all academic areas at the college level is most effective:

- When the student's work experience is directly related to the field of study in which the individual has a major interest.

- When the college or university awards academic credit for the student's work experience. The internship or co-op experience is offered as a course within the curriculum of the department under the guidance of a member of the faculty. (The co-op experience is a degree requirement in certain universities and is offered with or without credit units. Richard I. Ferrin and Solomon Arbeiter in *Bridging the Gap: A Study of Education-to-Work Linkages,* advocate that all secondary and postsecondary institutions provide and require work experiences of all students.)
- When minimum standards of work and performance are maintained by the educational institutions and the employers. The student's work is periodically evaluated by the employer, the university, and by the student.

CSU, Fullerton Co-op Program

Our program at California State University Fullerton has been in operation on a campus-wide basis for the past three years. Currently we have 1,250 students participating in cooperative education, all of whom receive academic credit for their work experience. Thirty different departments offer upper-division internship or co-op courses which carry from one to three semester units per term. At the present time, three departments – communications, human services, and public administration – include this course in the graduation requirements. Most of the departments place a total limit of six units of work experience courses that may be counted towards graduation. At Fullerton, the job assignment must be directly related to the student's major and at a level commensurate with the individual's background and ability. Our experience has shown that employers prefer students who have determined their own professional interests and are declared majors in a given field.

It is significant to note that there is a continuing trend toward the awarding of academic credit for experience. A recent survey showed that 76 percent of all two-year colleges and 63 percent of all senior colleges and universities awarded credit for co-operative work experience. About one-half of the reporting institutions required that the work must relate to the major.[1]

By the awarding of academic credit, the college or university formally recognizes that cooperative education is education. In this way the college certifies that the working experience is an integral part of the academic program. This work experience is evaluated and a given number of credit units is assigned. Thus, student enrollment in cooperative education adds academic units toward the total full-time equivalent enrollment of the institution. This is particularly important to public colleges and universities where budget allocations are based upon the number of full-time equivalent student enrollments.

Probably the most convenient and appropriate way to award credit for the cooperative work experience is to establish courses for this purpose. These credit courses can be offered within the curriculum of a given department or school or can be included for general credit towards a degree. When the working experience is directly related to the student's major, the co-op or internship course should become one of the departmental courses and offer credit for the degree in that academic discipline. This places the working experience on an equal footing with all of the other departmental offerings and recognizes the co-op course as an integral part of that particular educational program. Some departments and schools include the internship or co-op course as a requirement for the degree.

As with all other courses, the department assigns a member of its faculty to the co-op course. It becomes the duty of the instructor to counsel with students and with the employer-supervisors in the implementation of the work experience. The faculty coordinator may wish to hold periodic meetings with all of the students enrolled in the course to provide an opportunity for the interchange of co-op experiences and to give general instructions concerning the internships. The faculty coordinator should also make on-site visits with the student and the employer-supervisor. The faculty member also has the final responsibility to review and evaluate the reports of the employer-supervisor and the student before awarding the grade for the course.

When the work experience receives college credit, the student knows that the time and effort spent in the co-op assignment counts towards the college degree. Under these conditions the student's incentive to participate in cooperative education is increased. And as a result, the competition for co-op working assignments is greater, thereby improving the general quality of students in the program.

Cooperative education meets the educational needs of students in the present-day world. For the past several years, colleges and universities have been criticized on the basis that they do not prepare young people to assume their future role in business, industry, and government. The tightening job market in the 1970's has spotlighted the problem facing many college graduates – What does one do after college? By 1975 the hiring of all college graduates declined by more than 60 percent from 1965, and by more than 80 percent for those in the liberal arts. About two-thirds of our college students in the United States are majors in the humanities, social sciences, and other liberal arts. And a recent survey by the College Placement Council revealed that most employers filled less than 10 percent of their new college hires from the ranks of liberal arts graduates.

"Action-Learning" To Cope With Change

The present plight of the college graduate has led to serious concern over the function of educational institutions. As one asks of a student, "What is the University doing for you?", one might well receive the reply, "Well, it is equipping me for the best of all nonexistent worlds." We must give serious attention to an examination of our educational system in order to determine if it is meeting the demands of present-day society. We need to be concerned not only with the ability of the graduate to get a job, but also with his or her practical ability to anticipate and adapt to change.

Alvin Toffler, the futurist, in *Learning for Tomorrow: The Role of the Future in Education*, emphasizes that most educators fail to recognize that the acceleration of change means the swift arrival of a future that is radically different. In seeking viable alternatives to the traditional educational environment he accentuates the need for off-campus, out-of-the-classroom "action-learning" accomplished through participation in real work, in business, in community political organizing, in pollution control projects, or other projects. He feels that "action-learning" enables the motivation for learning to change. It is essential that we provide an educational environment which would assist learners to cope with real life crises, opportunities, and perils.

Cooperative education blends theory and practice, and is explicitly concerned with the development of competencies as well as knowledge. The combination of action-learning with academic course work creates a powerfully motivated and powerfully personal learning situation. Students are given an opportunity to test various work experiences with academic interests and career aspirations. Thus in a real sense, cooperative education is non-traditional education. It certainly fits well into the definition given by the Carnegie Commission on non-traditional study: "Non-traditional study is more an attitude than a system . . . . . This attitude puts the student first and the institution second, concentrates more on the former's need than the latter's convenience, encourages the diversity of individual opportunity rather than uniform prescription, and de-emphasizes time, space, and even course requirements, in favor of competency and, where applicable, performance."[2]

Most of today's students do not see themselves as an active part of society. Their life on campus often seems far removed from the world which surrounds them. In this day of large universities and mass education, students see the future as distinctly impersonal. They do not see themselves as a part of the picture. However, when a student enters the cooperative education program, he or she becomes a part of a highly individualized process. The individual's academic background and personal traits are reviewed in consideration of the work assignment. Each student is interviewed and counselled by the faculty coordinator and the employer-supervisor. The co-op's work experience is his or her own and each student is evaluated separately. Cooperative education individualizes mass education.

Cooperative education provides an opportunity for the student to participate actively in industry, business, and government. A successful work experience gives the individual self confidence and the feeling that "he or she can do it." Co-ops now think of themselves as adults and they believe they are qualified to assume their positions in society.

Conclusion

Thus, in summary, we have seen there is ample evidence to show that cooperative education *is* education. The basic principle of combining a working experience with formal study is not new but has been practiced for some time in America. The value of this program has been well demonstrated in many academic areas including medicine, dentistry, law, engineering, and business administration. More recently, we are realizing the value of cooperative education in the humanities, social sciences, and fine arts. It is an idea whose time has come.

Educational researcher Patricia Cross state it well: "Cooperative education is ahead of its time in educational philosophy . . . . . Cooperative education has avoided taking a strong 'either/or' position. It is not a question of whether academic content is more respectable or more important than applied learning. Rather the well-educated individual needs both, and cooperative education has the mechanism to provide this balance."[3]

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[1] Brown, Sylvia, and Wilson, James, "Survey of Cooperative Education 1975," *The Journal of Cooperative Education* XII, #1, November, 1975, p. 41.

[2] Cross, K. Patricia, and Valley, John R., and Associates, *Planning Non-Traditional Programs*, San Francisco, Jossey, Bass, 1974, p. ix.

[3] Cross, K. Patricia, "Views from the Outside," *The Journal of Cooperative Education* XII, #1, November, 1975, p. 13.

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